



Summer 2024

To the many who have cared,

From time to time, Only A Child experiences transitions. These are occasions when several of our residents take leave of us within a short period of time, many after having spent years living within the program. New youths then soon arrive to take their place and fill the vacancies left behind. Such a transition recently occurred, transpiring at the end of last year.

Andy was the first of the new arrivals, joining us in the third week of January. Following in-house protocol, our staff psychologist Luis Alfredo conducted a series of interviews with Andy and his parents, prior to his being accepted into our program. The process was more extensive than usual in Andy's case, as he had been extensively and, at times, brutally bullied throughout much of his childhood and adolescence. In response to the bullying, Andy had retreated into the solitude and safety of his parents home, to protect himself from further harm. His only sibling, an older sister, had married and moved out several years ago.

The goal and the need for the extended sessions was to determine if, after having lived so isolated an existence for several years, Andy would be comfortable sharing a home with up to 10 other residents. At the end of the interview process, Luis Alfredo concluded that, although Andy would require specific and additional attention in response to what he had endured, he would be able to adapt to living in a group home.

In some ways, the transition was an easy one, both for Andy and for us. Andy's mother and father admitted to Luis Alfredo that they had been distant parents. Perhaps his parent's indifference contributed to Andy's confessing that adapting to his new life with us had proven effortless for him. He showed no sense of having endured a difficult loss, after having taken leave of his parents and former home. He seemed to settle right in.

Andy can be hyperactive. Much of the time, Andy remains relatively calm, but then without warning something catches his attention in a way that excites him and he struggles to manage his enthusiasm. To the considerable credit of Andy's housemates, they have responded to such situations with patience and grace, giving him the time and space he needed to find his way into our home.

In other ways the adjustment to Andy's arrival has proved to be more challenging. Having lived so isolated an existence for years, he has struggled to grasp the concept of needing to be considerate of others. Andy is not intentionally rude or disrespectful, but can be thoughtless, showing an inability to consider how his decisions and actions might impact his housemates. He listens to music at high volume, often at unreasonable hours. He sometimes fails to clean up after himself when making use of common space, leaving the task to another. He occupies the bathroom for unnecessary and unreasonable amounts of time, testing both the patience and the constitutions of his housemates.

We have long provided and review as needed a list of rules and regulations for our residents. It not only offers specific guidelines as to what is expected of them while living under our care, but also, helps ensure that's everyone's desire to create and maintain a safe home and welcoming environment will be met with success.

Whenever the need arises to meet in private with one of our youths, a copy of the document is usually at hand. On the various occasions when Luis Alfredo, house parent Rigoberto and I have had to talk with Andy behind closed doors, only once did we have to refer to the list of rules and regulations. Nearly without fail, Andy is always ready and willing to acknowledge how and when and where he has not measured up, to both his own and our expectations. He is also quick to apologize and when in doubt, ask for advice as to how he might do better going forward.

Only A Child has used the same independent neighborhood school for nearly 20 years, always with good results. The public school system is badly deficient and, in the eyes of many parents and experts in education, not a viable option. Once it had become clear that Andy would likely join us, I requested a meeting with the school's founder and director to discuss a lingering concern, for to not do so would not only have been unwise, but also unethical.

As a consequence of the extensive bullying he experienced, Andy entered into period of cutting himself. The period lasted for the better part of a year, beginning in January of 2022 and ending in October of the same year. Cutting is a form of self-mutilation in which an abused person takes a knife or other sharp object and slashes their flesh. In most cases, the action is not intended to commit suicide, but rather, seeks to ease the tension and frustration of feeling trapped in a situation causing great pain.

In January of 2023, a year before he joined us, Andy changed schools, in an attempt to escape the bullying. He spent the ensuing school year meeting with the institution's psychologist. He benefited greatly from the sessions and the relationship he developed with the psychologist. It seems safe to assume that the change of venue and the therapy Andy received significantly contributed to his no longer needing to resort to cutting, to cope with harmful, anxiety provoking situations.

To my surprise and relief, our neighborhood school's director informed me at our meeting that they had significant experience in dealing with the matter and, in fact, currently had several other students who had experimented with cutting. In addition, the school has also installed cameras throughout the facility, in part to prevent bullying among its students.

Since beginning in January, Andy has adapted well to his new school. As in our home, situations requiring our attention have arisen. Andy suffers from Attention Deficit Disorder, or A.D.D., causing him at times to struggle to stay focused during class. Although his teachers have generally showed patience with Andy's A.D.D., they have on occasion, expressed frustration with me at Andy's tendency to disrupt class. Aware of the situation, Luis Alfredo continues to work with Andy to help him better manage his condition. It should be noted that during his time at Only A Child, Andy and Luis Alfredo have developed and maintained a close relationship.

Despite the fact that he will turn 17 in a matter of days, extensive isolation has left Andy inexperienced and underdeveloped in terms of and interacting with others. Thankfully he has been well received and is well liked by his classmates. Although he enjoys his new found acceptance, Andy has struggled on occasion to define and maintain appropriate boundaries with classmates, one time requiring the need



to meet with the school's assistant principal and members of staff. It was a situation in which horsing around between Andy and a classmate had gotten a little out of hand. No disciplinary action was ultimately taken, for everyone present agreed that the other party was not without blame, but the expectation was clear that such behavior would best be avoided in the future. For his part, Andy was, as always, respectful, cooperative and repentant.

Andy may continue to encounter such problems, especially at school. Simply put, there are seldom quick fixes for someone who has suffered as Andy has suffered. The schools officials are aware of Andy's history and appear to genuinely want to give him every chance to be a happy and successful student during his time with them. It is impossible to know what Andy's future will ultimately hold. But all of us at Only A Child are committed to work with Andy to the best of our ability, to help ensure that it will be one free of unnecessary struggle and pain.

I've reached the stage in my life when the word retirement seems to find its way into more and more conversations. All of a sudden, countless friends and contemporaries have decided it is time. Although I have considered it, I have decided that no, I am not yet ready to retire.

Seeing Andy happy and contented with his life within our program, while understanding to what degree he suffered before coming to us, compels me to put such thoughts on hold for the immediate future. For helping not only Andy, but also all of his housemates, as they work towards achieving the kinds of futures that would not be available to them without our support, without *your* support, provides me with all the motivation I need to keep this work active and productive.

Thank you for caring about this ministry, its work and those who benefit from it. Your concern and generosity ensures that we will continue to reach out to young men who, like Andy, have come to us in search of healing, hope and the chance for betterment.

May God bless.

*George*

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